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More than Gigabytes of Data

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More than Gigabytes of Data

Abstract

We quantify ourselves each day. Our identities are streamed in gigabytes of data that capture (and shape?) who we are, where we go, what we do, and even how we think. This notion that all that we are can be reduced to data is both exciting and frightening. How exciting that we might be on the threshold of understanding ourselves, or at least of getting a detailed picture of our patterns of being. But is that all? Are we, in the end, just a quintessence of data?

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More than gigabytes of data

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Gary Wolf and Kevin Kelly, editors of *Wired Magazine*, proposed the term “quantified” in 2007 to capture the idea of self-knowledge through self-tracking. The methods used are new – but the desire for self-knowledge is an ancient and very human drive. Science has given us myriad tools that take us further and further along the infinite road to self-knowledge. And the further we go, the more we learn, the closer we get to mystery. Seen up close (or from a vast distance away) the human being is a fascinating, ever-changing phenomenon that cannot be reduced to simple numbers. There is poetry in the forms and patterns of humanity and we do our utmost to articulate it. So, yes, we are indeed streams of data. But these data about us take on a multiplicity of forms, especially when science and the arts inform and extend each other. This issue of STEAM continues our efforts to understand and clarify what STEAM is. Integrating the arts into STEM helps us to balance and fully engage the best qualities of our minds so that we can fully explore the many ways in which we use very different types of data to express how we understand the world and our relationship to it.